

*Mobilizing Against Inequality. Unions, Immigrant Workers, and the Crisis of Capitalism.* By Lee H. Adler, Maite Tapia, and Lowell Turner. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2014. 210pp ISBN 978-0-8014-7933-5

*Industrial and Labor Relations Review*

"Mobilizing Against Inequality" is one of the most comprehensive and rich collections of comparative research on the relevant issue of labor strategies to organize and mobilize immigrant workers within contemporary capitalism. It is also valuable because it is one of the few existing resources of comparative research, which attempts to frame the analysis of union strategies of mobilization against inequality, and towards immigrant workers in particular, in historical perspective. Union strategies towards immigrant workers are examined over different historical periods in order to capture their evolution and consequently assess their impact both inside and outside Europe, through a remarkably representative set of contributions. By drawing on extraordinarily rich original data, the editors have clustered in this volume findings from in-depth qualitative studies of different industry and national settings, analyzing union strategies towards immigrant workers in four countries: Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 'economic, political and environmental unsustainability' of capitalism, with its extraordinary and growing levels of inequality in terms of a great concentration of wealth and power in the hands of few, is the context in which the editors frame the challenges facing both unions and immigrant workers in today's fragmented labor markets.

The book is divided into three parts. The contributions in Part I are broadly about how best to analytically understand union strategies towards immigrant workers in comparative perspective. These range from an accurate historical analysis of the causes and consequences of the crisis, to national case studies examining the impact of 'free-market' capitalism and segmented labor markets on labor and on the social rights of immigrant workers, to a conceptual framework for comparing union strategies towards immigrant workers across countries and industries, and across industries within the same country. Part II brings together case studies from different national contexts, examining in detail the content, development and changes of union strategies towards immigrant workers. It also underlines challenges and reasons for failure of various union strategies. Part III rigorously illuminates the opportunities and choices for unions through comparative chapters. The authors of these chapters stress that globalization and the crisis of capitalism have had a major impact on the lives of immigrant workers. While unions have challenged the marginalized position of migrant workers in the labor market and local communities, the results have varied across countries, reflecting in part important national differences in the historical understanding of immigration policy and attitudes towards immigrants. Finally, policy implications for labor are drawn. These emphasize the importance for unions to return to their social movement origins in order to capture broader social interests in contemporary society.

The fact that the volume is edited by US-educated academics all very much familiar with comparative European industrial relations research comes through in the structure and the content of the different chapters: wide-ranging literature from both sides of the Atlantic is organized around a large number of very clearly structured chapters. The thrust of their argument is that contemporary labor movements in Europe and the United States are surmounting the obstacles to immigrant labor organizing by launching creative, socially integrative campaigns and initiatives. Shifts in macro-

economic conditions seem to mediate the unions' approaches towards the mobilization of immigrant workers across (and within) all the four countries examined in the book. This argument is insightfully used to draw a 'dynamic' model of trade unionism which calls for organizing the unorganized, targeting youth, ethnic minorities, and low-wage workers in workplaces and communities. As such, and in accordance to the editors, this model offers a 'roadmap' for labor to pursue its historic mission of realizing an inclusive democratic society in a continuously changing and socially diversified world of work.

All these points are very reasonable and follow from a careful reading of the excellent empirical chapters in the book. What may be further asked here is under what conditions this model can be sustained in the long-term. In other words, what we witness today, particularly in Europe, although in different degrees amongst countries, is the deliberate dismantling of what may be considered 'core' institutions of the labor movement, such as centralized collective bargaining systems. The history of social democracy in Europe clearly illustrates that success in achieving low inequality has a lot to do with union success in building up centralized and solidarity-based collective bargaining structures supported by a social democratic state. The gradual chipping away of the institutional preconditions for guaranteeing equality seems to be fundamentally tied up with the decline of the countervailing power of labor and the institutions that it produced and sustained. Thereby the question is to what extent will unions be able to build countervailing power within a context characterized by the gradual and continuous eroding of institutions – particularly centralized collective bargaining – which traditionally strongly sustained and supported it..

By slightly re-phrasing the editors' argument one can say that, because of the weakening of the above mentioned industrial relations institutions, unions need more than ever to empower and mobilize immigrant workers – and I would add all the marginalized social groups in society – in order to restore their basis of countervailing power and potentially broaden social cohesion. But how might this be achieved? We have to admit that socio-political and economic circumstances are different today than in the past. With particular attention to the West of Europe we can see that companies and plants have deeply changed. The buildings where capitalism gathered and molded blue-collars workers into a class, no longer even look like factories. This creates challenges to union attempts at organizing, which are sharply and rigorously illustrated in the book. For example, the authors of Chapter 8 state that "one of the most fundamental challenges faced by the labor movement is trying to organize in the macroeconomic climate in the contemporary context of neo-liberalism" (p. 139). Here, they quote Richard Hyman who has pointed out that "whether and how unions respond to internal and external challenges is conditioned by what may be termed organizational capacity".

The major strength of this book remains its strong scientific and policy contribution. It provides rich evidence that there is potential to find alternative means of social expression during these hard times characterized by the weakening of institutional channels of workers' representation and collective bargaining; and that globalization and capitalism have not reduced the capacity of people to fight for their social rights. The different chapters of this book provide clear and detailed evidence that many immigrant workers whom unions were able to organize were found in sectors that are the most difficult to organize, because they are in traditionally non-union, low paid, multiemployer and geographically dispersed sectors. However, the unions' success depends on their ability to change their organizing models and practices as well as the way in which campaigns are framed. What more can be said? This is the big challenge for the global labor movement because it necessitates internal

**Comment [I1]:** Hope the editing does not change the intended meaning; not sure whether you mean that conditions facilitate the mobilization of immigrant workers or the union interest in mobilizing them

**Comment [vp2]:** It is indeed "the union approach to mobilising strategies towards immigrant workers" . I have changed it. Please see whether it fits.

**Comment [I3]:** Including ? targeting?

VP: OK

**Comment [I4]:** ethnic minorities?

VP: OK

rethinking and restructuring of its traditional models of membership, while coordinating successfully across-borders. It implies that unions be first and foremost a primary social and political actor in society. It requires unions to reposition humanistic objectives and social welfare and social rights at the top of their priorities. We wish the cutting-edge cases presented in this book can be of inspiration for the trade union movement worldwide.

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